

The following content is provided under a Creative Commons license. Your support will help MIT OpenCourseWare continue to offer high quality educational resources for free. To make a donation or view additional materials from hundreds of MIT courses, visit MIT OpenCourseWare at [ocw.mit.edu](http://ocw.mit.edu).

**PROFESSOR:** All right, so this weekend's reading was met because he was giving a YouTube presentation. Actually it was a Google presentation that was recorded onto YouTube. And he's the designer of *Pandemic*, he also made the game *Forbidden Island*, and I think he also did--*Desert*. I'm assuming that he did *Forbidden Desert*. That's my guess because they're not that different of games. I mean, these are cooperative games, for the most part. How many of you have played one of these games? *Forbidden Island*, *Pandemic*-- *Pandemic* the board game, specifically. Yeah, OK. *Pandemic* the computer game is a completely different game. Huh?

**AUDIENCE:** *Pandemic Two*, the online game?

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah. The one where you shut off Madagascar.

**AUDIENCE:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**PROFESSOR:** OK, that one is a different game. It's same title, same concept, right. I mean, it sort of made sense that they would have [INAUDIBLE]. I mean, there's probably more of a similarity of civilization of board game than civilization of computer games. Although the civilization that you play as a board game nowadays was not the same civilization the board game that existed when the computer game [INAUDIBLE].

**AUDIENCE:** [INAUDIBLE]

**PROFESSOR:** The computer game aside, you can play the-- how many of you basically played a game where it just turned into one person telling you to do everything? That's my [INAUDIBLE]. How many of you had the same thing happen with either *Forbidden Island* or *Forbidden Desert*? It happened with you two? Or were you the one telling people [INAUDIBLE]?

[LAUGHTER]

**PROFESSOR:** So it seems-- actually, how many people play *Forbidden Island* or *Desert*? OK, only one. OK.

**AUDIENCE:** So 100%.

**PROFESSOR:** So maybe it happens a lot more often. I don't know. It finds it happens a little bit less often with *Island*, but it happens to me every time I play *Pandemic*. On one hand I'm usually the one receiving orders, and I don't mind because I'm not that invested in it. But on the other hand, I'm not that invested in it. It kind of like takes me out. When someone starts telling me, this is what you should do, clearly this is the optimal move. This is the thing that you should do. It's like, that's fine. I'll do it. I don't care about this game anymore because I don't have any [INAUDIBLE]. But I don't know. Yeah?

**AUDIENCE:** So in my experience it's always been each of the players is doing that.

**PROFESSOR:** Everybody else is telling you to do something?

**AUDIENCE:** Every single person is telling every single other person exactly what to do, and every person ends up making a decision for themselves. Just at the end being like, OK guys, here's what I'm actually doing because I think that [INAUDIBLE].

**PROFESSOR:** That sounds reasonably interactive and you still have a decision to make anyway.

**AUDIENCE:** It's fun because you actually get to like-- people actually listen--

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah.

**AUDIENCE:** --on one hand because when you bring up a good point they'll be like, oh yeah, that's a good point. But on the other hand, no one-- it's not one person playing the game.

**PROFESSOR:** It's like a board of directors giving you advice, and then you've got to figure out what's the right thing to do.

**AUDIENCE:** Except as you're done you start giving advice.

**PROFESSOR:** And everyone switches roles.

**AUDIENCE:** I don't know if you're saying it's a negative, necessarily.

**PROFESSOR:** I'm not necessarily saying that.

**AUDIENCE:** But I feel like that might have very well been what he was going for. Like in the video he was all talking about his wife, and like, he wanted to be able to play with his wife, right? So this is kind of a serious gamer can play it with someone that's not as invested is kind of what you're saying a little bit.

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah, I mean, as a result I've played many games of Pandemic, which is a good thing. Yeah?

**AUDIENCE:** Sometimes I think, like, [INAUDIBLE]

**PROFESSOR:** Right. Like deliberately sabotaging.

**AUDIENCE:** Yeah. Also, there's a game that [INAUDIBLE] being play tested basically. Called [INAUDIBLE], it's like, really pretty tactical. There's like a [INAUDIBLE] strategic components and you have teams of players [INAUDIBLE], but there's huge-- there are large player [INAUDIBLE], but at the same time it's really hard for one player to go help someone else on their team and do everything else components of two minutes for your turn. And so it happens [INAUDIBLE] someone is, where like, someone steps in and tries to help someone else, and they end up screwing it up even worse because they didn't realize that they [INAUDIBLE] everything that was going on and didn't have the time to analyze it properly.

**PROFESSOR:** I think that's like an example of what you're describing as well as like here. In the realm of [INAUDIBLE] co-op games or games with a very strong [INAUDIBLE] component, you got-- there is an assumption, at least in games like *Pandemic*, that it's not so much that something is out there strategizing to beat you and you're trying to overcome it-- like a different player, for instance, who is trying to achieve victory at your cost. It's more about, can you get your affairs and your communication and your decision making lined up [INAUDIBLE] so that you can actually overcome the odds that the designer has set up for you? So I think in the case of the [INAUDIBLE] games, there's actually somebody out there who's actively playing the game who's actively trying to win at the expense of your victory. So one way that I certainly see is the [? timing, ?] right is it's OK to cooperate as much as you want in a minute.

And that just leads to, like, confusion and bad judgment calls and sometimes hilarity and [INAUDIBLE] *space Alert*, which is maybe a game which you should [INAUDIBLE] because it's-- for those people who don't remember me describing it in previous classes, you're all members of a starship. You all pretty much aren't sure what you're supposed to be doing. You're playing the game in real time because events happen as you play an audio track that just runs nonstop.

It never pauses until the game is over. And you all have to be very, very coordinated to get anything done. Just like firing a single gun requires you to charge up that gun, turning on a shield so that you can block enemy fire needs to be on at the moment the enemy fire is about to hit you, I think-- as I recall [INAUDIBLE]. But [INAUDIBLE] it just [INAUDIBLE].

**AUDIENCE:** [INAUDIBLE] and also because there's so many threats [INAUDIBLE] it's very easy to, like, accidentally run out of energy or to do things where they [INAUDIBLE] or miss if you don't [INAUDIBLE] one of the [INAUDIBLE] things is obviously, like, [INAUDIBLE] fires their gun at like some threat, but they fired it a turn before it appears [INAUDIBLE].

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah.

**AUDIENCE:** Which is like [INAUDIBLE].

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah, because [INAUDIBLE] has a range, if I recall, right? An effective range. So, you're all trying to achieve simultaneous victory.

You're all trying to not die in that game. But because you have so little time to be able to figure out what the right thing is to do, you just [INAUDIBLE]. That's not the case, I believe, in *Desert Island* and *Pandemic*.

You have about as much time as you like to make a group decision. But it's fairly [INAUDIBLE] these sort of competing cooperative games, where your only opponent is the game system the designers really created for you. You can of course set difficulty levels in a lot of these games.

If you're learning it for the first time, you play it on kind of the easy set up. And if you're [INAUDIBLE] with all the mechanics of the game, you can sort of crank up the difficulty by starting the game at a point of [INAUDIBLE]. But I think-- anything else that anyone noticed from his thoughts about the design of cooperative games?

**AUDIENCE:** You mentioned-- I think it might have been in the video or something else [INAUDIBLE] the rule that said that you couldn't show anybody else--

**PROFESSOR:** Your hand?

**AUDIENCE:** Your hand.

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah.

**AUDIENCE:** Because that was a very important component of [INAUDIBLE].

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah, yeah.

**AUDIENCE:** I didn't understand the [INAUDIBLE].

**PROFESSOR:** It's kind of giving you still something to do. Because you have information that no one else has until you share it, there's still the thing that you can do, which is share the information that you got, even though it's not necessarily information that you probably-- in a game like "Pandemic," it's not information you want to hide.

You want everyone else to know this information So there's still a decision to be made even though there's activity to be done. But in a game where time is limited, then yes, there becomes a decision of, do I want to share this piece of information?

Because it's taking away time from doing something else. I worked on a game with the Education Arcade, which is a research group here based in [INAUDIBLE]. And a long time ago, we made a game where it was a location based game.

So everyone's walking around with GPS [INAUDIBLE] smart devices. And everyone is trying to investigate the ground water contamination, basically, but everyone also was one of three different classes and they would get different information based on which class they were.

Some of them were, like, [INAUDIBLE] some of them were more-- I'm trying to remember what-- some of them were biologists. Some of them were geologists. I think one of one was, like, construction engineer or something like that. So you knew things about how things were built but you didn't necessarily know much about what type of animals will be affected by [INAUDIBLE]

And so in the game, information that you got were private, but it was the kind of thing that you want to share. Now, in a location based game, sharing information becomes tough because everyone is physically spread out over an area. This was a game that was played over the entire MIT campus.

Everyone had walkie talkies. But the nice thing about walkie talkies is that only one person can talk at a time. Otherwise, no one really can make sense of everything.

And it's still kind of the case as you try to play the game with cell phones because you can only talk to one person at a time unless you, like, set up some crazy network. Even if you try to do text messaging, that's [INAUDIBLE], right? So that's one way that you can get people involved and feel like they're contributing, which is just, give everybody little fragments of information that they need and then get them to-- and then the game becomes more about how do you go about sharing this information rather than what decision you make with the information.

[INAUDIBLE] once you got all the information, there is a decision to be made. And in some cases, it feels like a board room where everyone's got different ideas and trying to encourage you to do it in certain ways. And that's great, because [INAUDIBLE] is weighing the pros and cons of every possible option.

But in some cases, it's just, like, one person just decides to be the decider and is going to tell everybody else the decisions and then everyone else [INAUDIBLE]. Has anyone played, like, sort of cooperative live action-type games? [INAUDIBLE]?

**AUDIENCE:** Oh, cooperative live action type games. I played [INAUDIBLE] where there was, like-- I mean, a lot of [INAUDIBLE] to do when you're [INAUDIBLE] make sure that-- you need to get everyone's [INAUDIBLE] because that will make people communicate and work [INAUDIBLE]. And oftentimes-- so, for [INAUDIBLE] like, I remember [INAUDIBLE] in particular, there was [INAUDIBLE]

You would need, like, [INAUDIBLE] components, which you can [INAUDIBLE] on your own. You can gather the resources and stuff. And then you needed to successfully [INAUDIBLE] in the blank, Hangman or Pictionary or something that's describing [INAUDIBLE]

And it was nice to have this cooperation [INAUDIBLE] cooperation is like, did someone want to, like, [INAUDIBLE] trying to describe [INAUDIBLE] face to someone. And it was also [INAUDIBLE] like, share a little bit about them. It also was interesting is that oftentimes, someone says, does anyone want to, like, when you're doing Pictionary, trying to describe the word destruction. It's like [INAUDIBLE] people talk about your research after that.

**PROFESSOR:** Right, right. Of course, yeah. Yeah. So I think what you're describing is, like, the live action role playing [INAUDIBLE].

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah, live action [INAUDIBLE].

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah. But a lot of live action role playing games, even though you may be cooperative on that one activity, you don't know what the motive of every single person in that room is. Whereas in non-LARP type games but that are played out in live action-- say, training simulations, for instance-- often, everyone's actually on the same team. Everyone is very, very clear [INAUDIBLE] working toward a common goal, just given different roles.

So, [INAUDIBLE] I trained a couple of years in the Army and we had a lot of live action training simulations where, yeah, everyone's on the same team and there are instructors out there trying to make your life difficult, sure. But everybody that you're actually working with is communicating and trying to do the best job that they can towards the common goal. Has anyone gone through anything like a sort of simulated exercise or anything-- either an evaluation or-- you know, like an emergency evacuation?

**AUDIENCE:** Yeah, [INAUDIBLE] fire drills.

**PROFESSOR:** We have fire drills. All right, that's a great insight. Everybody wants to get out of the building alive without falling all over, sure. And that's a great example, yes.

**AUDIENCE:** [INAUDIBLE] in a lot of the, like, scenarios that [INAUDIBLE] you and your team [INAUDIBLE] even a company trying to design this product and you had all these challenges. And it was primarily intended to be cooperative [INAUDIBLE] an element of, like, [INAUDIBLE] other team [INAUDIBLE]

**PROFESSOR:** Do you-- so you compete with the other teams for the-- do you feel like you're in competition with the other teams while you are basing your decisions? Or is it really just like right at the end when you present everything?

**AUDIENCE:** Mostly right at the end, but there were certain ones where, you know, you had like a shop and there were pieces you could get while you were waiting in line to get different pieces. Like, you were kind of looking at what all the other groups are doing.

**PROFESSOR:** OK

**AUDIENCE:** And part of it was because it was the same groups all semester. Even if there wasn't any [INAUDIBLE] competition between groups at first, but because over the entire semester, you were working with the same team. You kind of develop a [INAUDIBLE]

**PROFESSOR:** Yes, yes, I've been in similar exercises, mostly in school as well.

**AUDIENCE:** Could this go as simple as just playing Lava when you're, like, three years old and you can't touch the ground, and you get from one end of the room to the other without ever touching the ground, jump pillar to pillar or something?

**PROFESSOR:** Well, let me see. I guess [INAUDIBLE] cooperative, I guess. There's player versus gravity, pretty much. And yeah, I mean, it depends on whether your goal is to be the last person standing, in which it does become a competitive game.

**AUDIENCE:** Sure, but it was one where you're just trying to get from one side of the room to the other, something like that.

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah.

**AUDIENCE:** And you're working together.

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah, if you're all working together, I would say that is a fairly cooperative game and the rules are fairly simple. Just don't fall off pillows which are unstable. And that's very different from having different roles. Everybody has the same role. Everybody is just put in a situation where they can't accomplish much on their own but you can do quite a lot if they pull--

**AUDIENCE:** I always played with my sister, and we kind of had different roles, because I was three years older than her. When we were five years old, I could jump [INAUDIBLE] further than her, right?

**PROFESSOR:** OK.

**AUDIENCE:** [INAUDIBLE] put up different roles there a little bit.

**PROFESSOR:** I mean, she also has a lower center of gravity, I'm suggesting then?

**AUDIENCE:** Sure, she could also barely walk.

**PROFESSOR:** So you're playing with your sister. So, it's kind of interesting. I don't actually like a lot of creativity competitions where they put teams against each other.

I understand that it does get people enthusiastic and engaged and [INAUDIBLE] they want to be able to do the best. But it discourages a lot of information sharing, which could actually be better for learning in the process. So when we were [INAUDIBLE], for instance, a lot of [INAUDIBLE] run by colleges will give out awards. They'll quite simply have prizes for people who win maximum applause or something like that. I think we do give verbal [INAUDIBLE]. Has anybody ever done, like, [INAUDIBLE] awards?

**AUDIENCE:** No, I've never done any awards. When We're doing [INAUDIBLE] the joy of engagement is being able to share [INAUDIBLE] and making sure people share throughout [INAUDIBLE]

**PROFESSOR:** And those are usually the shout outs that give [INAUDIBLE]. These are the people who really helped as a team, the people who were clearly a benefit to more than just one project. We will do those kind of shout outs because in learning situations [INAUDIBLE]

For competitive situations where you don't expect to have a lot of information sharing-- say, a school versus a school competition. It could be math. It could be sports.

It could be-- we're working on one right now, which is a [INAUDIBLE] competition, a satellite programming thing. Some of you might have seen the email about that, where a lot of the schools that are working together are geographically separated by different countries, probably speaking different languages. So there may not be terribly much information sharing to begin with.

So it makes sense that they won't be sharing information with people that are geographically close to them. So it's OK to sort of put them in competition with each other while expecting they're going to cooperate entirely within their own team. But there's a deep wrinkle to that one, which is when it gets to the final rounds, three schools are put together and one school is always geographically separated from the other one.

And that gives students an experience of what it's like to actually work on the state, right? Because you are working with different companies which are writing code to all run on the same machine. But-- and all trying to accomplish different [INAUDIBLE] problems that they're given [INAUDIBLE] so difficult that one school-- one school could probably do a mediocre job on it, but you need the resources of three schools and all the kids in three schools to be able to solve this particular space problem.

So you need to communicate and you need to share. And that's an interesting [INAUDIBLE] of the game where, again, it's all about what are the limits of communication? We talk about time.

We talk about physical distance being a limit of communication. What about things like language? About things like time zones? All right, so any of the games that you are making, cooperative games, I think are also competitive in a way?

**AUDIENCE:** [INAUDIBLE] the end goal is [INAUDIBLE] I mean--

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah, it's--

**AUDIENCE:** In the end, it's like a competitive thing, but to achieve the most you can, it would be be cooperative.

**PROFESSOR:** OK, is this the base [INAUDIBLE] one? No. [INAUDIBLE]

**AUDIENCE:** No. Well, yes. I was going to say, we're definitely cooperative. [INAUDIBLE] well, two teams, I guess.

**AUDIENCE:** Two versus one [INAUDIBLE].

**AUDIENCE:** Yeah.

**PROFESSOR:** Oh, it's two competitive teams.

**AUDIENCE:** Yes.

**PROFESSOR:** So you have cooperation within the team and competition between teams. And which game was the one that [INAUDIBLE]

**AUDIENCE:** The ship captain one.

**PROFESSOR:** The ship captain one, right, right, where [INAUDIBLE] trying to [INAUDIBLE] put all of this information together, right. So, is there anything from Matt's presentation that you might want to try out in a game?

**AUDIENCE:** I really like the idea small leveling, kind of. So you said he had three-- he gave the flow chart, which I really like.

**PROFESSOR:** Right, right, right.

**AUDIENCE:** Right? So you want to make it balanced between players' skill and [INAUDIBLE]. And if there's too much [INAUDIBLE] players' skills, you have anxiety. And if there's too much player skill and too little [INAUDIBLE], you get boredom.

So we have like a basic version that you can just start with. And then if you're a really good gamer, you might move onto the normal version or the advanced version really quickly. And first, I was like, oh, this is really complicated, right?

Three versions of the game. Then, you play [INAUDIBLE] and you just add one [INAUDIBLE] to that. And that's [INAUDIBLE] changes [INAUDIBLE].

**PROFESSOR:** And that's another-- in *Forbidden Island*, I believe the only change in difficulty is that you start-- the way [INAUDIBLE] works is that you are on an island that's slowly sinking into the water. And [? there's a ?] water level marker. So by increasing difficulty, I believe you just start at a higher level of water. And more stuff is submerged at the beginning of the game. But the rules don't change.

And if you're going to try to do something like that in your game, I would certainly encourage you to think of difficulty levels in that way. Don't give us, like, here are the simple set of rules for simple players and the advanced set of rules for players. Those don't change things like just the starting conditions so that I-- I wouldn't encourage you to change, like, individual variables in your game because that might be too complicated to get across. But things like setup-- that's, OK. Once you've got the whole game set up at the correct difficult level.

Don't have to worry about the differences between setup for easy or setup for hard. Giving people extra options, for instance, by giving them extra cards or something like that could also be a good way to be able to [INAUDIBLE] change the level of difficulty throughout the game. That's a good idea.

[INAUDIBLE] there's something I was talking about cooperative and competitive. He just talks a lot about what it was like to design his first board game. I believe he said that that was his first board game. [INAUDIBLE] his first published board game [INAUDIBLE].



**AUDIENCE:** First one was [INAUDIBLE] Fish and Chips.

**PROFESSOR:** Oh, yeah. Oh right, Fish and Chips. That's right.

**AUDIENCE:** Oh, wait. I just got that joke. Wow.

**PROFESSOR:** So-- but anyone observe or hear anything interesting from that one? From the [INAUDIBLE] talking outside of the cooperative and competitive [INAUDIBLE] cooperative game design?

**AUDIENCE:** [INAUDIBLE] do you just mean something interesting about the talk?

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah, anything else that was interesting. I've been asking you questions specifically on his thoughts on cooperative games like [INAUDIBLE]. But that's only part of the talk. That's not his whole talk. So I was just wondering if anyone noticed anything interesting.

**AUDIENCE:** I think [INAUDIBLE] he mentioned Ameritrash [INAUDIBLE] games.

**PROFESSOR:** Ah, yeah.

**AUDIENCE:** Something I haven't heard of. And then when I looked online, it seems to be either something that has made it [INAUDIBLE], sort of?

**PROFESSOR:** It's one of those almost invented internet forum arguments. But it's one that-- I mean, it's like the [INAUDIBLE] of the [INAUDIBLE] in game design. That's another one where-- that's the sort of thing that you see now just to make people roll [INAUDIBLE]

But back in the '90s, I guess, it was a bigger thing. It was like, are games about the systems or are games about the stories? The whole thing was just that and it was people sort of arguing past each other-- not actually waiting to talk to each other, just wanted to shout at each other about it. And Ameritrash and Euro games are one of those things purely, from the description of Ameritrash, you can sort of expect that the people who like Euro games gave it that term.

**AUDIENCE:** [INAUDIBLE] argument, because the Ameritrash games were-- the big problem with the Ameritrash games were the Milton-Bradley Gamemakers games. I think they were called Gamemakers or Game Masters series in the mid '80s. Like [INAUDIBLE]

There's another [INAUDIBLE] one. But games with a board and lots of little plastic pieces where there's a lot of, like, details given to the [INAUDIBLE] molding on the pieces rather than the system. Like, that's where it was thought the money was spent. Where a Euro game is, well, it's little wooden cubes, and not much theme going on. And so the system has more the amount of attention and detail [INAUDIBLE]

**PROFESSOR:** There is a lower cost version that is along those same lines, because Ameritrash is a lot about presentation, right? This is just-- so, a lot of-- I tried to think. Munchkin?

Anyone play Munchkin? Yeah, OK. So, you know, this card game about sort of dungeon crawling, being really bad role playing gamers. And it's all about the art. It's all about funny text that they've written. It's not necessarily about cool-looking pieces, but it's about cool looking cards that you can laugh with, you know, while you're playing the game. But a game [INAUDIBLE] itself, [INAUDIBLE] actually [INAUDIBLE]

**AUDIENCE:** I might call Magic Ameritrash.

**PROFESSOR:** And Magic-- the Gathering sort of trades [INAUDIBLE] same sort of thing as like [INAUDIBLE] layered complexity on top of complexity [INAUDIBLE] very little elegance to the [? system, ?] right? But every once in a while, they sort it out and then it becomes a pretty elegant system and they then keep adding things on top of it. That's because that's how their business model works.

**AUDIENCE:** So I guess a big question about [INAUDIBLE]. How is Ameritrash different from the theme games like Monopoly [INAUDIBLE]?

**PROFESSOR:** Not that different. It's a more derogatory term, but I think when it comes to the stuff that's really old like "Monopoly," there's a limited level of presentation they could possibly achieve with traditional manufacturing. And by the time the [INAUDIBLE] term Ameritrash had shown up, games like Monopoly and Clue and all that had already been shrunk down into budget versions.

You know, it's like, you're no longer getting metal pieces. You're getting little plastic pieces that barely look like the dog or the hat they're supposed to be. Games like "Battleship" where it's like, the whole idea is that it's not really, like, the "Battleship" kit looks nice.

It's just like this small part of [INAUDIBLE] manufacturing and people grew up playing Battleship. And those games are being sold on a completely different premise. Those games are primarily nostalgia games.

Those games are games that you bought because you played them at one point in time. But I think Ameritrash was mostly used to brand a certain kind of game that you'll be buying because you want to play for the first time-- like "Munchkin" that you buy to play with a bunch of friends, often published by companies that either had a war gaming background or a role playing book kind of background like Steve Jackson, for instance. Because they're used-- actually I believe [INAUDIBLE]. Actually, I'm not so sure if this came up in class. This is something that I remember hearing recently. The idea of the game writer, you know-- what is [INAUDIBLE]?

**AUDIENCE:** Yeah, Mack was talking about-- writer verses inventor versus designer.

**PROFESSOR:** Right, so the idea is that games were things that you would write comes out from the role playing game industry, where their primary product was books. And sure, books included descriptions of systems, but [INAUDIBLE] prose is your tool to be able to get things across. [INAUDIBLE] to try to use prose on the things that prose is good at-- on things like creating atmosphere, giving you exclusive detail about the setting a whole world or characters, and things like that.

Whereas the Euro games, the Euro games were originally designed for quite a different market from the role playing. Traditionally, role playing games are designed for enthusiasts. Euro games are designed for Christmas presents.

Very specifically, they're designed to sell lots and lots and lots of copies at Christmas to families. So, not only had the systems have to be simple enough for kids to be able to learn, but also advanced enough for adults to be able to want to play them and give them away as gifts to other people. And so that's a lot of attention paid to, like, simple rules, very, very complex interactions. And I don't know what the push towards the simplicity of [INAUDIBLE], sort of the abstraction of, like, cubes and circles and maybe [INAUDIBLE] like the are, like, [INAUDIBLE]

**AUDIENCE:** A lot of it is [INAUDIBLE] factory [INAUDIBLE] the one factory that makes it all.

**PROFESSOR:** [INAUDIBLE] one?

**AUDIENCE:** There's one factory in Germany that made most of them. They don't make them in China, those games.

**PROFESSOR:** OK. So that's economy of scale there, I guess. [INAUDIBLE] easier to make than anything else?

**AUDIENCE:** So, when it comes to-- like I said, Euro games are for families and Christmas presents and stuff? That feels kind of weird to me because I'd expect for children to care a lot about the presentation of the game. So, how would you reconcile that, I guess?

**PROFESSOR:** I don't know much about that social dynamics of the Euro game family. Who makes the call of what game they're going to play, right? Is it the kids or is it the parents?

I certainly grew up in a family where the parents would say, this is what we're playing now. We are playing "Scrabble" because mom likes "Scrabble" and mom will destroy all of us at "Scrabble". So I don't know if that's the same thing in European families.

**AUDIENCE:** And so we had a professor come in who talked about this a couple years ago where one thing that happened, at least in Germany, is there is a conference called [INAUDIBLE] Fair?

**PROFESSOR:** Trade Fair.

**AUDIENCE:** Trade Fair. [INAUDIBLE] fair happened in Germany. Thousands upon thousands of people in Germany go to that fair to play the new games before they're published. And [INAUDIBLE] fairs, they give this spiel [INAUDIBLE] awards, the game of the year awards, which then if you get that award, they'll sell a [INAUDIBLE]

**PROFESSOR:** Because every newspaper will cover it.

**AUDIENCE:** All the newspapers are going to cover it. But those families were going to go there, play those games. The kids are going to be interested in those games. Then, when Christmas time comes around, the game they get is going to be the game that won the [INAUDIBLE] award, not necessarily the game they played at the convention.

But that's the game that got the award. Everybody bought it that year. And the next year at flea markets, that game is all over the place [INAUDIBLE] So there's a little-- it's a very different kind of consumption economy going on over there. But here, it's a hobby market. Here, it's the [INAUDIBLE] stores. It's not necessarily family oriented at all or family [INAUDIBLE] included in a particular kind of family organization.

**PROFESSOR:** So they're like toy [INAUDIBLE] in the US, then, like Tickle Me Elmo and Furby.

**AUDIENCE:** Yeah, the toy fairs are-- yeah, in the US, they're inventors, products from China and again, one thing gets bought and one thing is sold and everybody wants that one thing every single year.

**PROFESSOR:** But the majority of people who go to [INAUDIBLE] are, in fact, families-- tourists, you know. But a lot of them are probably tourists from other parts of Germany [INAUDIBLE], but also from Europe as a whole. But of course, there's a small number of people who are going to [INAUDIBLE] who are the [INAUDIBLE] the people who are going to decide what's [INAUDIBLE].

And they are looking at the families They're trying to figure out what is going to be that hot product this year so they can get new [? orders ?] in. [INAUDIBLE]

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**AUDIENCE:** What time of year is it?

**PROFESSOR:** I think it's August.

**AUDIENCE:** Yeah, it's summer. [INAUDIBLE]

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah, so-- but I don't know the extent to which the manufacturers need to have lined up their pipelines before [INAUDIBLE] in order to be able to capitalize on the [INAUDIBLE] Because if you fail to miss your window-- if you get the award and you can't actually put [INAUDIBLE] product down there, then you can't make as much money as you [INAUDIBLE].

**AUDIENCE:** And the toy fairs in the US, are they mainly consumers going to it or the industry, the professionals, and they're sort of, like, rubbing shoulders?

**PROFESSOR:** Press. Press go to toy fairs as well.

**AUDIENCE:** Yes, press, industry, Walmart, basically. [INAUDIBLE] Walmart and a couple others.

**AUDIENCE:** So it's like, you're an inventor. You're trying to get on Walmart's shelf. So that's why you go?

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah.

**AUDIENCE:** You're trying to find, the next hot toy for Christmas. And that's why they--

**PROFESSOR:** Well, I'm not so sure that the toy fairs in the US are that inventor friendly.

**AUDIENCE:** Yeah, the inventors have already gotten things [? off ?] by somebody. So it's the publisher. It's the maker who has already had the stable of inventors they purchased the product form. And they're making it to this place to test it out, see [INAUDIBLE]

**AUDIENCE:** But who are they testing it on?

**AUDIENCE:** The press and the people who are going to sell it. But-- [INAUDIBLE] Exactly.

**AUDIENCE:** Isn't [INAUDIBLE] backwards, though? Because it's the consumer that's going to be buying it, not the--

**AUDIENCE:** The consumer doesn't have a need for it until they find out about it, though. It's a very different process. The consumer is like, when you look at toys, just look at the US toy industry. The customer just isn't involved.

**AUDIENCE:** It's just whatever the hype machine builds up?

**AUDIENCE:** Yep, whichever hype machine has the most money behind it gets the product on the shelves. And these days, it's [INAUDIBLE] properties [INAUDIBLE] trans media, but like, most media properties. There's-- the game, the toy, the [INAUDIBLE], the comic, everything around it.

**AUDIENCE:** Like a multi platform.

**AUDIENCE:** Yeah, yeah.

**PROFESSOR:** [INAUDIBLE] because you have multiple advertising campaigns pushing each one of these threads. But they're also sort of pushing the entire [INAUDIBLE].

**AUDIENCE:** If this is something of interest to you, go to a Walgreens or a CVS. Go to the toy area, and look at the toys that have really poorly designed games on the back of them just to kind of see, like, these are the things [INAUDIBLE]. Somebody made it. It didn't get much press.

It didn't get that [INAUDIBLE] behind it. And just, these are [INAUDIBLE] what is the effort they put into that thing? For the most part, it's just packaging. The actual thing [? that's inside ?] of the package.

**PROFESSOR:** I'm trying to think. Where is the big toy fair in the US?

**AUDIENCE:** In New York.

**PROFESSOR:** In New York f Do you know when it is, ish? The summer, I suppose?

**AUDIENCE:** I want to say summer because [INAUDIBLE] Toys "R" Us. Well, I helped [INAUDIBLE] Toys "R" Us [INAUDIBLE] do this thing for a toy fair. I want to say but I could be wrong.

**PROFESSOR:** Did you [INAUDIBLE]?

**AUDIENCE:** I didn't actually go. I just shipped the product.

**PROFESSOR:** OK, so, my [INAUDIBLE] You may see a [INAUDIBLE] collectors, in particular.

**AUDIENCE:** My customer was, like, they made point of purchase displays. They made point of purchase displays for retail outlets and it was like a huge deal for them.

**PROFESSOR:** OK, so this is where they're selling things to stores to sell things, not the actual product that [INAUDIBLE]. Be caring sure. [INAUDIBLE]

**AUDIENCE:** February.

**PROFESSOR:** February? Gee.

**AUDIENCE:** Toy fair in New York-- 2015, February 14 [INAUDIBLE].

**PROFESSOR:** Oh good lord. February-- OK. I have a lot more to learn about the toy industry.

**AUDIENCE:** So I guess it's Valentine's Day, after cards, then toys.

**PROFESSOR:** The other thing that I thought was actually kind of interesting in the video that was how he was talking with the folks at [INAUDIBLE]. And he was describing about embodying the player, giving the player something that he can identify with either on the board or if all else fails, somewhere in the packaging, something that he can project himself into. I'm not entirely sure if that is sort of universally accepted across all publishers or even conventional wisdom across the board game industry, but it's certainly interesting to see it from the point of view of one publisher saying, this is something important about the games that we want to publish.

And we got a little bit of this from the [INAUDIBLE] gaming [INAUDIBLE] the other day. But it's [INAUDIBLE] I tend to go to the publisher and try to say, this is a game that [? could be ?] interesting, definitely try to do some research on not just the kind of games that they make, but also how they present those games to people, right? You know, you can probably make a good game.

Like, the people who are at those companies have seen enough good games to be able to see past anything you may have missed. But it might improve your pitch a little bit and say, we've taken into account that you like-- I've taken into account that you like to position your games, present your games a certain way. And this is how you could do it with the game that I'm pitching to you, even though what I'm showing right now, the prototype. They didn't have that.

Just being able to be able to speak to that means [INAUDIBLE] you're aware of the company's strategy and how [INAUDIBLE]. So if you are talking to a publisher, which generally does [INAUDIBLE] you know, I don't know who publishes [INAUDIBLE] but someone does, because I [INAUDIBLE]. But to say that this particular set of game mechanics would be a great tie in for this particular property or something that you already have. Even though that may not be something that you want to do, it's probably good for a publisher to be able to realize that you understand [INAUDIBLE] particular section of the business that you're in.

**AUDIENCE:** It's also some so Fantasy Flight, don't want you to have IP attached to your games. They're going to bring their IP to the games. So they want mechanics. They want rules. They want how it's going to play, but they don't care about-- the space travel game. You might sell for them. And they say, all right, it's a [INAUDIBLE] fantasy game, the IP [INAUDIBLE] with us here.

**PROFESSOR:** Also, probably gives you an idea of the kind of deal and contract you can get out of them. Because if you say you want to retain absolute creative control on it and determine the art that's going to go on the box or something like that, you might even be able to get that contract from someone like Fantasy Flight, but it's something that might be negotiable for--

**AUDIENCE:** [INAUDIBLE] there you would talk to them about what Kickstarter campaign you're going to run. That's what they're going to do-- a Kickstarter campaign with the game that they're publishing with you.

**PROFESSOR:** So in other words, before you go and do a pitch at the publisher, just don't go in with a [? generic ?] pitch. [INAUDIBLE] go into something like a convention. You know, there are games that just have different [INAUDIBLE], for instance. [INAUDIBLE] of EB Games. There's one that's going to be right here on campus. If you've got a prototype that you want to let people know about and make-- I guess we don't get many publishers here, but you might get--

**AUDIENCE:** That's probably going to change soon.

**PROFESSOR:** Yeah, Gathering of Friends is one such group where you have inventors and publishers all sitting at a big table. You don't need to [INAUDIBLE] prepare something special for publishers [INAUDIBLE] because they show you to multiple publishers at once.

[INAUDIBLE] actually going to submit it to Hasbro or something that. You might just want to say this might make a great Transformers game because parts connect to each other or object [INAUDIBLE] mode, or something with that. Yeah, that's what I want to say about that.

So, today is [INAUDIBLE] play test day. It's almost 2:00. We had all our parts up here.

So, how about we start play test at 3 o'clock? That should probably give you enough time to be able to get something playable by then, I'm hoping. Figure out what you want to test, how you're going to present it to people, and what questions you need answered to [INAUDIBLE]